

Should You Represent Yourself?

You have a right to represent yourself in court, but before you do, think about whether it is a good idea. The legal system is complex. You may think your case is easy, but there may be things about the law that you do not know, which could harm your interests in the long run. Here are some other things for you to think about:

- **Is there a lawyer on the other side?** Lawyers are trained to present cases. They know the law and court rules. If there is a lawyer on the other side, it might be harder for you to present your case. Will you learn the rules well enough to be able to respond correctly?
- **Can you meet deadlines?** If you represent yourself in court, you must follow the same rules lawyers have to follow. That means that you will have to meet deadlines, like filing papers with the court on time. If you do something wrong, there may be serious consequences, maybe even as serious as losing your case.
- **Can you find the time to go to the courthouse during the day?** You will need to file papers in the clerk's office and go to hearings before the judge. Courthouses are only open during the daytime, and you may have to go there several times throughout your case.
- **Are you organized?** You will need to keep track of the things you have to do in the case and their deadlines, as well as all the papers that you and the other side give to the court.
- **Can you pay attention to detail?** There will likely be a lot of paperwork, and you will have to prove your case with evidence that the judge allows you to present, such as testimony from witnesses and documents like pay stubs, receipts, and income tax returns. You will need to plan every detail of presenting your case to the judge and then do it in an effective and precise way.

If you have a hard time with any of these things – meeting deadlines, being able to go to court, staying organized, and paying attention to detail – you should strongly consider hiring a lawyer.

If your case is a divorce case, ask yourself these questions as well:

- Are you looking to get even?
- Do you have valuable property such as a house, a pension or a retirement account?
- Was there physical or emotional abuse in your marriage?
- Do you find yourself yelling at your spouse whenever you try to make decisions together about your children or money?

If you answered yes to any of these questions, you should get a lawyer. A lawyer will not be as emotionally involved and can help you make good legal decisions. If your case involves domestic violence, please watch the video titled, "Get a Protective Order." It explains how to get a protective order in Texas.